SA TOWER
Baltimore & Ohio Railroad
Between SR 2006 and
West portal of Sand Patch Tunnel
Sand Patch vicinity
Somerset County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-376

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

SA TOWER
Baltimore & Ohio Railroad
HAER No. PA-376

Location:	Between SR 2006, and west portal of Sand Patch Tunnel, Larimer Township, Somerset County, Pennsylvania
Date of Construction:	ca. 1912
Present Owner:	CSX
Present Use:	Railroad Signal Tower
Significance:	Completed about 1912, the SA tower controls retains its original switching and signalling equipment, incuding its hydraulic switching rods that run alongside the tracks to the track's two double crossovers.
Historian:	Scott C. Brown, 1992.
Project Information:	The results of the study of Somerset County were published in 1994: Gray Fitzsimons, Ken Rose, and Patricia Summers (eds), Somerest County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service). The contents of the publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress as individual reports. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

Located at a strategic point on the B&O Railroad, at the summit of the Sand Patch Pass of Allegheny Mountain, the SA Tower is a two-story brick structure with a concrete foundation and a hipped roof with wide eaves. Its first-floor windows contain four panes each with slightly arched lintels. Several of the two-over-two-light, double-hung second floor windows have been replaced with glass blocks. Raised and recessed brick patterns adorn the facades.

The tower controls the switching and signalling of railroad cars through the use of hydraulic switching rods that run alongside the tracks to the two double crossovers. While this is an outdated switching system, frequent maintenance allows SA Tower to continue to serve its purpose. Track switches manufactured by the General Railway Signal Company of Rochester, New York, are in use, including early hand-controlled levers in the second floor control room. Signals to proceed are activated by these levers only when the track switches are in the correct and locked positions. The traffic at the bottom of Sand Patch grade in Bedford County is controlled by Q Tower.

SA Tower, constructed probably around 1912, was named for the original telegraph call letters. It most likely replaced an earlier frame tower that once stood on the opposite side of the tracks. It remains an important site on the Pittsburgh Division of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Adjacent to SA Tower was the town of Sand Patch. Another tower at Manilla on the east side of the tunnel, GR Tower, once controlled traffic on that side of the tunnel. No longer extant and almost identical to SA Tower, it replaced a frame two-story structure at that site probably about 1912. Track switching at the site of GR Tower is now controlled from SA Tower. Because railroads are shifting to centralized traffic control systems run by computers, and replacing towers with small signal cabinets with electrical switches, this tower may soon become obsolete.

Sources:

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company. "Official List No. 30, Form 6: Officers, Agents, Stations, Sidings and Mileage of the Above Line." 1 January 1954.

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